

3 displaying at least one grouping wherein each said grouping comprises one of said
4 features visually related to respective alternatives.

1 ⁷ ~~36~~. (New) ⁶ The method according to claim ~~35~~ and further comprising the step of:
2 providing an interactive pointer and displaying information specific to one of said
3 features upon a user initiated signal when said pointer is pointing to a feature caption on said
4 feature screen.

1 ⁶ ~~37~~. (New) The method according to claim ~~35~~ wherein at least one said groupings is
2 hidden from view if all said respective alternatives are not available.

REMARKS

Entry of above amendments is respectfully requested.

In addition to this amendment, applicants submit herewith a revocation and power of attorney and a petition for extension of time to respond to the office action of January 4, 2000.

Claim 1 has been amended in two respects. First, the limitations requiring the identification of unavailable alternatives and the display of available alternatives as distinct from the unavailable alternatives have been deleted. These limitations were necessary in the parent applications to distinguish over the Cochran reference. As a result of the further amendments to claim 1, claim 1 now distinguishes over Cochran for other reasons and these limitations therefore cause claim 1 to be limited to less than the full scope of the invention to which applicants believe they are entitled to patent protection.

Second, claim 1 as amended is now limited to a particular approach to conducting iterative searches in a database. Often, once a first search has been conducted, and a subfamily of items corresponding to the first selection criteria identified, subsequent searches are conducted only using additional criteria not included in the first criteria, and only upon the subfamily of items resulting from that first search. As described in amended claim 1, however, subsequent

searches of the inventive method use a concatenated set of search criteria comprising the first search selection criteria plus the selection criteria added through a second selection criteria. This concatenated search is conducted over the entire universe of items in the database or family, rather than just those items in the subfamily identified as a result of the first search. As explained in the specification at page 37 and following, there are significant advantages to this approach to iterative searches, particularly in network environments such as the Internet. The prior art does not teach the invention of the claim, as so amended.

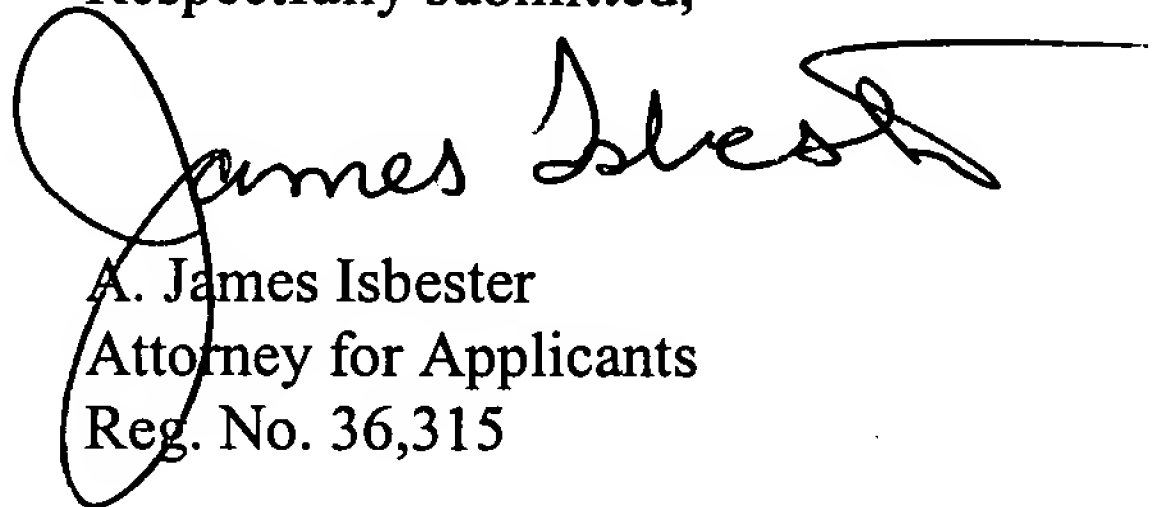
New claim 31 addresses a further feature of the method described in the specification. In conducting iterative searches, it is possible that the searcher will select a number of alternatives that, taken together in a single selection criteria, define a null set. In order that the user not encounter null set search results, the system automatically creates a new, broader selection criteria by disregarding the alternative the searcher most recently added to the selection criteria. Nothing in the prior art suggests this approach to the problem of null set search results. Indeed, both Cochran and Lewak suggest avoiding the null set problem entirely by permitting the user to add only one selection criteria at a time and then limiting the choices of selection criteria only to those that will yield at least one item in the search results.

The examiner's double patenting objection is noted and respectfully traversed. As amended, the pending claims describe subject matter patentably distinct from anything claimed in either of the applicants' related patents. Applicants respectfully submit that an iterative approach to searching in which concatenated search criteria are applied to the entire universe of items to be searched is not obvious in light of any of the claims that have gone before. Moreover, applicant's specific approach to the problem of the null set search result is not the subject of any issued claims.

Applicants believe that the claims are now in a condition for allowance and request the examiner's prompt attention. Applicants' counsel, James Isbester can be reached by telephone at (415) 393-8353 should the examiner desire to discuss this matter further.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any shortage in the fees in connection with the filing of this paper to Deposit Account No. 50-0440.

Respectfully submitted,


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